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ABSTRACT

The three or four months preceding March 1974, demonstrated there are things we can do individually and as a nation which will affect the number of highway accidents, the severity of injuries, and the number of deaths resulting from those accidents. The use of lap and shoulder belts, the lowering of maximum speed limits, and the decrease in total traffic volumes on streets and highways because of the fuel shortage have all helped reduce traffic accident statistics. Drunken driving, however, still poses a considerable hazard. The relationship between lowered drinking age and driving accidents involving youth has not been positively determined. It is known that young people are involved in more traffic accidents and more fatal accidents than their proportion of the driving population. The foremost reason for holding this conference is to explore ways young people can be involved and participate in planning and executing local and State safety programs. (A seven-page National Highway Traffic Safety Administration booklet for young drivers is included.) (AG)

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# YOU'RE A BIG PART OF WHAT HAPPENS

Remarks of

Dr. James B. Gregory
National Highway Traffic Safety Administrator
at the
Youths Conference
Scottsdale, Arizona
March 29, 1974

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
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Ladies and Gentlemen:

It's a privilege, indeed, to be able to chat with you this evening for a few minutes. I have had the good fortune to meet many of you already, and this Conference is a good chance to get to know you all a little better. I know one thing for sure: it is good for my morale to know that so many dedicated, active young people such as yourselves are working to help achieve our mutual and very worthwhile objective of reducing injury and death on our highways.

Back in August, when I took this job, I said something to the effect that our traffic safety problems in the last analysis were going to be solved out where the people are, along stretches of country road, up and down our city streets, and at every intersection where accidents are likely to occur. I have been asked frequently about that statement. I have been asked by several reporters whether there has now been a shift in focus by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration away from making the vehicle more safe toward emphasis on the driver and the road.

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My response has been that we must have what I call a balanced program. NHTSA addresses itself to two sciences. On the one hand, there are the physical and engineering sciences. We have done a good bit to make cars safer to drive and safer to ride in. I don't think anyone can say that we are neglecting these sciences after reading our proposal to require passive restraints beginning with automobiles produced on September 1, 1976. In addition, we have asked for comments on increasing occupant protection at higher speeds of 45 or 50 miles an hour. We have made these proposals because we believe technology is here or imminent to reduce death and injury under these more severe conditions when crashes do occur.

But difficult as it is, we still cannot afford to neglect the social sciences, that is, improving driver capability and changing driver attitudes.

This balanced program that I keep talking about is our attempt to zero in on those areas of the physical and engineering sciences and the social sciences which we know most about and which can impact earliest the bottom line of highway safety, that is, the number of accidents, the severity of injuries, and the number of deaths which have kept rising as more and more cars have come on the road, driving more and more miles each year, and as more and more drivers have taken the wheel.

The question has always been: Can human habits be changed to affect that bottom line? We are getting part of the answer today and the answer is "Yes."

Before the energy shortage really showed up in the latter half of 1973, our statisticians were predicting an increase in fatalities for the year 1973 as compared to 1972. Suddenly in November we spotted a reduction in total fatalities followed by an even larger drop in December. Back in September and October, NHTSA anticipated what might happen and we were able to follow these statistics as closely as we could by a "hot line" data acquisition system through which we could detect any changes that were occurring.

The major factors underlying the decreases which we saw were, of course, the lowering of maximum speed limits by certain States and the decrease in total traffic volume on our streets and highways because of fuel conservation measures. While all States had fewer fatalities in December 1973 as compared to 1972, the decrease was twice as great in the 18 States that had lowered their speed limits, as compared to those who had not. By January the figures from all the 50 States showed there were 853 fewer deaths in January of 1974 than January 1973, a reduction of almost 23 percent.

So, the lesson here is that a commonly held myth about highway traffic safety has been effectively exploded. Over the years, many of us had often sensed a prevailing attitude in America to the effect that not much can really be done about the traffic accidents occurring daily on our Nation's highways. Often, it seems, many people, particularly those who have never been personally involved in highway tragedy, have shrugged off the growing toll of deaths and injuries because they recognize that during the same period the number of vehicle miles driven has also increased -- markedly. And so they had more or less accepted today's -- or I should say, yesterday's -- highway statistics as being as pre-ordained as the laws of nature. NONSENSE!

The good news of the last several months is that, collectively, individuals do have it within their power to do something about highway safety. By the way, I am not joyously advocating that we should continue to use our cars under all of today's energy constraints. At the same time, I must say that we as a Nation must continue to conserve our energy resources. I am afraid that we must face the fact that easily available and cheap energy as we have known it over the past generation or so has come to an end.

Rather I think the message from what we have seen over the past three or four months in highway safety is that there are things we can do individually and as a Nation which, when added up, affect those bottom line highway statistics.

We have known for some time, for example, that if everyone individually used the safety belts presently available to him, the lap and shoulder belts together, fatalities would be cut by as many as 15,000 a year nation wide. But people have not, to this point, felt self-compelled to buckle-up. Seventy-five to 80 percent of our citizens have been indifferent, negative, or uninformed about safety belt usage and the positive benefits of wearing belts when a crash situation occurs. I would hope that the lesson of highway safety coming about as the result of the energy shortage will be translated into positive action in the State legislatures across the land to enact safety belt use laws.

Commenting for a moment on our Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, as you know, the 1974 cars all incorporate the "interlock" system requiring that drivers and occupants in the front seat buckle-up before their automobile can be started. Our initial results are heartening, particularly from the standpoint of shoulder belt usage. We are finding that something in the order of 55 to 60 percent of 1974 car occupants are using the new

three-point interlock belts correctly. Thus, our first data say that the use of lap belts has increased from the 1973 car level of 30 to 40 percent up to 50 to 60 percent. Even more dramatic, shoulder belt usage, which characteristically has been below 5 percent, has increased in the order of 10 times because of the interlock. As we go along, I am confident that we will be able to detect a reduction in the severity of injuries as well as a reduction in the fatalities as a result of this new mechanism, criticized though it has been in many quarters.

Let us now turn to the greatest social menace to human life and safety on our Nation's highways -- drunk driving. We are making some progress in this area but new factors continue to arise which indicate that there is still a lot of hard work ahead. One new factor that we are evaluating is the problem posed by States which have lowered their drinking age. Some statistics tell us that this has caused a three-fold increase in the number of young people involved in alcohol-related accidents. Other statistics indicate that the problems of young people drinking and driving are no worse than before. We are still working to obtain a valid answer to this question.

This leads me to the reasons behind the calling of this National Youth Conference on Highway Safety. Many of our highway safety problems seem to be unique to young drivers, and we feel that the young

people who have been invited to participate in this Conference can help us find the proper solutions and that they can exert a positive influence on the driving habits of other young people.

The issues we will be discussing during the course of the Conference include the over-involvement of young people in all types of accidents and particularly fatal accidents. I am going to use few statistics in discussing these issues, but I think at the outset it is well for all of us to remember that more persons are killed each year on our highways than were killed during our entire Vietnamese involvement.

Young Americans have grown up in a highly mobile society and quite naturally have developed a love affair with the automobile. You represent over 20 percent of the total driving population and there were 25 and a half million of you in 1972. I am very concerned, and I'm sure you are very concerned, that the driving and accident records of drivers 24 years of age and younger are not as good as those of the rest of the driving population. For example, these young drivers (15-24) have over one and one-half times (162 percent) the fatal and total crash involvements of the next 10 year age group (25-34) and from two to seven times the involvement of older age groups. If we look at

all drivers involved in crashes we find that over one-third (36.5 percent) of them involve drivers 24 years or younger, yet this group constitutes only about one-fifth of the total driving population.

Another thing that concerns me, and I'm sure you, is the fact that young people are killing themselves off at a fantastic rate. For example, between 1968 and 1972, persons 15-24 years of age accounted for between 35 and 36 percent of all motor vehicle occupant deaths and 37 to 40 percent of all vehicle occupant injuries.

Highway accidents rank sixth among the leading causes of death in the United States, and they take a disproportionate toll among the younger elements of our population. Highway accident causation ranks first in the 15-24 year old age group, second in the one-14 age group, and third in the 25-44 group. When you realize that four of the five other leading causes of death -- heart disease, cancer, and stroke -- are diseases of advancing age, it is tragically seen that motor vehicle accidents are mostly life extinguishing events for our youths in contrast to the life ending events of later life.

The question is, of course, what can we do about this? We are all here today because several months ago, at the urging of the Youths Highway Safety Advisory Committee, I wrote letters to the Governors

of the States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Indian Nations. I asked them to send delegates to Scottsdale so that we could explore and discuss new ideas for reducing the highway carnage involving our youth. The Governors responded magnificently and I am pleased to note that tonight there are representatives here from 47 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Indian Nations. In addition, over half of the States have sent a delegate from the Office of the Governors' Highway Safety Representative, and all ten of the NHTSA Regional Offices are represented at this Conference.

Perhaps first I should tell you what we are not trying to do here in Scottsdale. We are not trying to set up a national youth organization. In some areas of the country, private organizations have been active in this field for many years and we have no desire to replace their efforts. Notable among these is the National Safety Council and I am sure that Mr. Tofany in his address on Sunday will tell you of some of their impressive activities.

Our foremost reason for holding this Conference is to explore the ways in which young people can become actively involved and participate in the planning and carrying out of local and State highway safety programs that will have a direct influence on young drivers. I would

also add that if you can affect the behavior of young drivers you will undoubtedly have an affect upon all of the drivers in your State and in your community. I think it is significant that this meeting is being held in Scottsdale, Arizona, because Arizona was one of the first States to organize young people for the cause of highway safety, on a Statewide basis. Some of their achievements have been outstanding and have gained notice for this young group, not only in the State of Arizona, but throughout the United States. I speak particularly to their efforts toward bringing home to the citizens and motorists of Arizona the necessity for periodic motor vehicle inspection. We know that defective cars do cause accidents. A recently completed study by Indiana University showed that vehicle defects caused at least six percent of all of the accidents they investigated. And on top of that, defects were a contributing factor in another 12 percent. So you can add those together and get at least an 18 percent involvement of defects in accidents. Trends over the years have indicated that the States that have the more rigorous inspection programs have the vehicles with fewer defects. So inspections can and do identify defects. The young people of Arizona are to be commended for their Statewide campaign which involved planning and carrying out voluntary motor vehicle inspections. During the next day and one-half, you will hear of some of the fine programs which have been conducted by similar groups in other States.

I am also pleased tonight to tell you that the NHTSA is firmly committed to aiding and encouraging the participation of young adults in State and local highway safety programs. We have already made a start in that direction with the establishment of our Youths Highway Safety Advisory Committee. We have had many useful suggestions from this group, not the least of which was that additional research needed to be done in the area of alcohol and drug involvement of young drivers. With their recommendation, a research program was initiated to develop and test potential countermeasures for those two menaces to both youth and highway safety.

There is a need for better communications between State youth groups and the NHTSA. To this end, I am offering the services of our Administration to provide speakers when you need them. I am pleased that many of our Youths Advisory Committee members have also volunteered their services to assist you in establishing speaker-bureaus in your own State.

Our office of youth activities is going to serve as an informal clearing house for communications between States, private groups, and the Federal Government. We expect in the very near future to publish the first edition of a youth activities newsletter which will keep everyone better informed. The newsletter will not only tell you of

news concerning our national highway traffic safety programs, but will also bring you news of what's going on in other States and communities.

I mentioned that we had representatives here from each of our Regional Offices. Each Regional Office has been asked to designate a key person to work through the Governors' Representatives to encourage the establishment of youth organizations and support their activities in every State. I also mentioned that a number of the Governors' Representatives are here tonight. We have a very close working relationship with these Representatives and will do all within our power to assist them in working with you.

A large number of national organizations are also interested in various aspects of highway safety. These we wish to encourage and hope that they will continue. Within the last few weeks I received a letter from the Boy Scouts of America submitting a proposal to make Emergency Medical Technician training available to Explorer Scouts. Normally, Explorer Scouts are younger than the minimum age which we had set for this type of training. However, the benefits which could be derived from this program are such that I have granted a waiver to the 18-year-old age requirement. The Explorers and Leaders

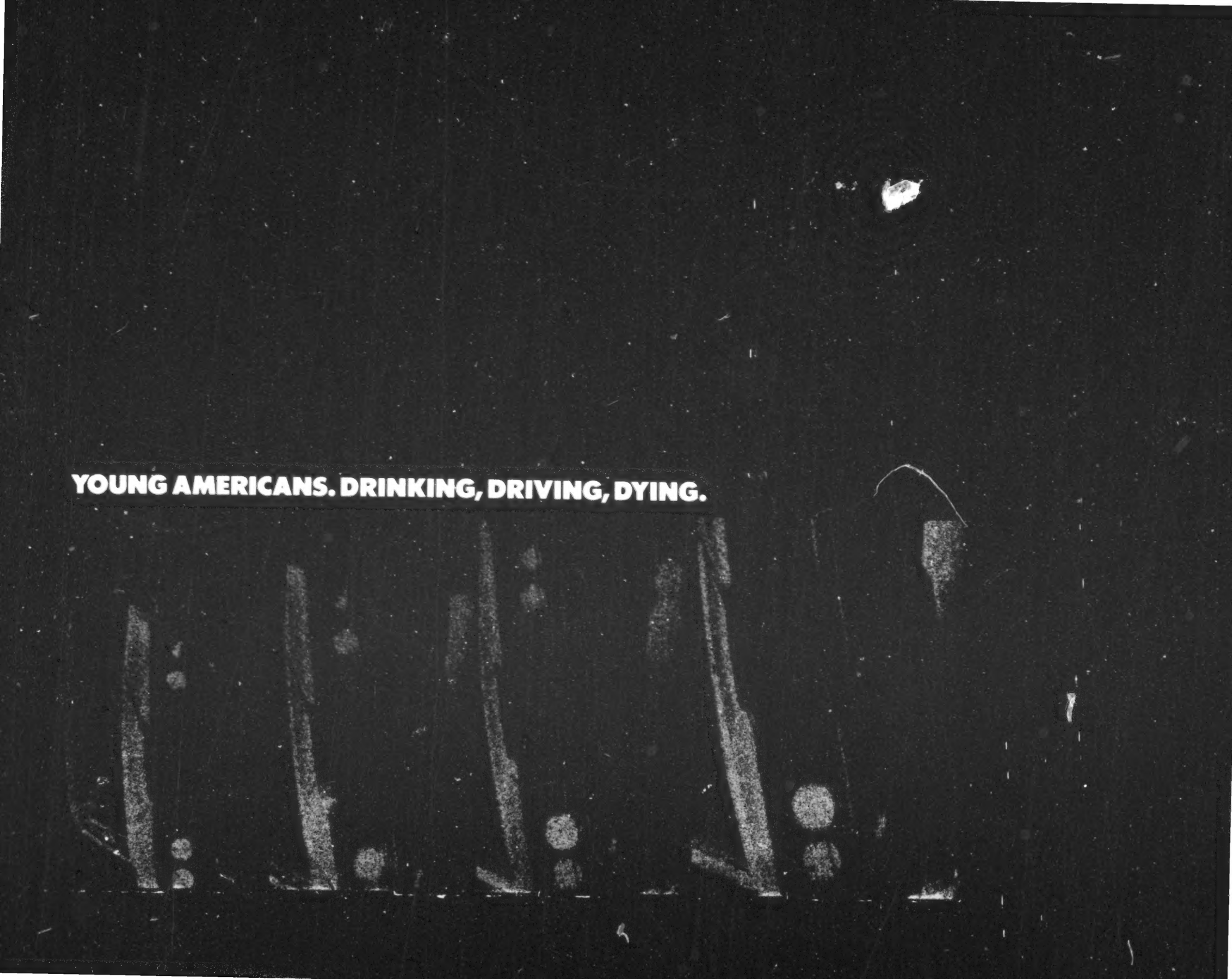
who will participate in this program are committing themselves to the full 81 hours of instructions and subsequent qualification as Emergency Medical Technicians. I previously mentioned the work of the National Safety Council. There are of course, a number of other private organizations working for highway safety. These examples indicate the degree of interest throughout the Nation in working with young people in highway safety related activities.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration will continue to coordinate our activities with those of such organizations as the National Safety Council, the Boy Scouts of America, other organizations, and yourselves, and will keep you informed of the progress we are making together through our youth activities newsletter.

In closing, I again would like to thank Governor Williams for inviting us to his beautiful State and to thank Mr. Cates the Chairman of the Youths Highway Safety Advisory Committee for inviting me to chat with you this evening. I know that the next day and a half are crammed with activities, and I know that each of you will derive benefits from this Conference which you can use in achieving the vitally necessary reductions of injuries and fatalities to our young people on the Nation's roads and highways. More important than listening to the many speakers you hear are the conclusions you come to and the action you take.

Our Nation needs "bottom line" results, and we look to you for your help and guidance. I titled this talk "You're a Big Part of What Happens." Nobody needs to tell you that. In the long run you are <u>all</u> of what happens. And thank God we've got you.

Thank you very much.


YOUNG AMERICANS. DRINKING, DRIVING, DYING.

# THE PROBLEM.

About 50 young Americans will be killed today. Nearly 250 will be maimed or disfigured.

Not from drugs or disease. But from alcohol.

About 50 will die on America's highways. Half of them because someone was drunk.

Not a 40-year-old drunk. Not someone with a red nose and a pot belly.

But someone like you.

Someone, who just this once, had too much wine at a party, or too much beer at a drive-in.

Someone who, just this once, is drunk out of his mind and behind the wheel of a car.

He might kill his best friend. He might kill a stranger.

Or he might just kill himself.

But either way, someone young and alive is suddenly young and dead.

Nearly 8,000 young Americans are killed in one year in drunk-driving accidents.

That's more than war. More than drugs, or suicide, or disease. And most are killed by people their own age.

In fact, the number one killer of young Americans is young Americans.

It doesn't make any sense.

You're young. Just beginning to really live.

You see things wrong in the world and want to change them.

You march against war, protest against pollution because you want a better life for everyone.

Yet the thing that cripples and kills more young Americans than anything else, you do nothing about.

The automobile is the greatest single threat to people under 30.

And you do absolutely nothing about it.

It just doesn't make any sense.

## WHAT'S BEEN DONE.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has formed a group of young people called the Youths Highway Safety Advisory Committee.

They're a small group. But young and enthusiastic.

Their primary function is to advise the Department's Highway Traffic Safety Administrator on ways to involve young people in working for increased highway safety.

Some of the recommendations they've made so far are:

1. That research be undertaken immediately to provide the Committee and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration with the information needed to formulate effective countermeasures to the problem of young people and drinking-driving.

The problem can be solved. Once we have the facts.

2. That the Governor of every State, or his personal representative appoint a statewide Governor's Youth Committee on Highway Safety.

Other young Americans have made these suggestions:

1. That driver education courses realistically deal with the effects of drinking on driving. And that driver's license applicants be required to show a knowledge of alcohol's effect on the human body.

These things should be learned in a classroom. Not in a moving car.

2. That inexpensive breath testers be available wherever alcohol is sold.

A breath tester is a better judge of how drunk you are than you are.

3. That support be given to State legislative efforts which would make it illegal for a person to drive with a Blood Alcohol Concentration of .10% or more.

But the government can't do it all.

You have to do your part too.

You have the energy, the enthusiasm, and the desire. Or at least you should.

Because you're the ones being killed.

# WHAT YOU CAN DO.

1. Investigate.

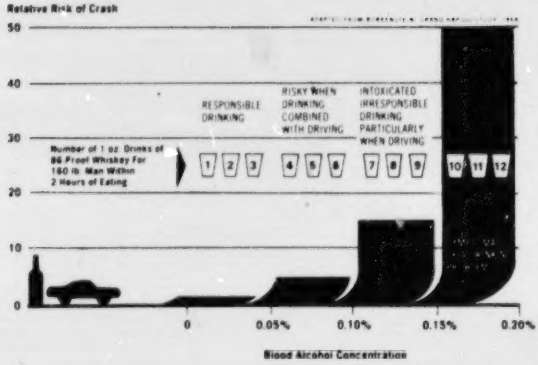
Inquire whether your State has a Youth Highway Safety Committee. If your State already has such a committee, find out what they're doing and how you can help. If not, take steps through your local elected officials to form one.

And make sure the local organization of which you are a member (fraternities and similar youth-oriented groups) takes an active role in the success of this objective.

2. Know how much drinking can affect your driving.

Some people think the mere presence of alcohol on the breath is enough to mark you legally drunk and that the drivers who are caught are just unlucky. But drunk, in terms of the National Standard, means a BAC of .10%. (BAC—Blood Alcohol Concentration—means the amount of alcohol in the bloodstream.) And to reach a BAC of .10%, a 160-lb. man has to drink at least 7 one-ounce drinks of 86-proof whiskey in two hours after eating. Of course, you can also get there by having a couple of drinks an hour for several hours. It all depends on how much you weigh. The lighter you are, the faster you become intoxicated. And sometimes, it's difficult to know who is most qualified to drive.

## Drinking and Highway Safety




According to research tests, the risk of a person becoming involved in a crash begins to increase at .05% BAC. At .10% BAC, a person is about seven times more likely to crash than if he were sober. And at .15% BAC a person is 25 times more likely to have an accident. If you've been drinking but "feel fine," know that alcohol can be deceiving. In highway crashes, it's the BAC that counts, not how you walk or talk. The chart we've provided illustrates the risk of crashing in relation to BAC.

You should also know this, however. The chart is a general guideline only. It represents results of tests done with people who are older than you. Consequently, they're more experienced. As drivers. And as drinkers. And, since small amounts of alcohol can impair judgment before driving skills are affected, you are probably in greater danger at around .05% BAC than older, more experienced

drinker-drivers. Remember that. And be extremely careful. Your life depends on it.

3. Find out if your school and adult driver education programs include drunk driver information.

New drivers should learn not only how to drive but also the dangers of driving when they've been drinking. In addition, the State's driver manual should have information on the dangers, laws, and penalties of drinking and driving. If alcohol information is not part of the driver education program where you live, do something about it.

4. Keep the people you love alive.

Tell them how big a problem this is. If they are part of the problem, try to help them. Don't let them drive when they've been drinking. If you give a party and you want all your guests to be alive for the next party, make other arrangements for the ones who shouldn't be driving. Call a cab. Better still, let them stay over.

5. Help us tell the world.

If you know any public officials, encourage them to speak out on the drunk driver problem. Even if you don't know them, write to them and invite them to speak to your group or at your school. Remember that your State and city governments have the tools to solve the problem. They have a set of uniform standards, and they have the flexibility to provide for the treatment and rehabilitation of the problem drinker following his identification. But without the help of the people, the tools are worthless.

These are just a few of the things you can do.
There are two things you must do.
Stop driving drunk. Stop killing each other.

U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Revised October 1973